

CALL MR. ROBESON: A life, with songs.

Written and Performed by Tayo Aluko,

With Michael Conliffe, Piano

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Greetings. Two years ago to the day, Barack Obama made his historic victory speech to the world in Chicago. In the euphoria of the moment, people may have missed the significance of these words: "The road may be long, our climb steep". Well, as he and the world found out yesterday, never was a truer word spoken. Well, those words echoed those sung and spoken by thousands before him, like the composers of the spiritual "Hold On, Keep your Hand on de Plough", which became "Keep Your Eyes on the Prize" in the modern civil rights movement. Those before him who sang, preached and lived such dogged determination included Paul Robeson, whose story I have the honour to present today. In the UK, and around the world, we are being warned that long, hard times are a-comin', and that we are all in it together. I see quite a bit of unrest down the road, as people fight to keep their jobs and livelihoods. I know Robeson would be on the side of such ordinary folk and would be prepared to take the criticism that may be heaped on him for doing so. Compared to what he went to in his lifetime, it would be water off a duck's back. I hope his story inspires Mr. Obama (and the rest of us) to take sides and keep our eyes on the prize, however steep the climb, or rocky the road.